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ABSTRACT

In 1981, Save the Children (SC) opened an office in Nepal to support projects related to health, education, income generation, and resource management. Statistics show that between 7 and 8 million of Nepal's 19 million people live below the poverty line, and almost 2 out of 3 adolescent girls do not attend school, placing the overall female literacy rate at only 18%. In recognition of economic and educational needs, SC organized a community-based, nonformal education program to promote literacy and community organization in a rural area of the country. SC enlisted community participation by requiring each literacy group to: (1) pay for books, registration, and a partially subsidized tuition; (2) construct a shelter for the school; and (3) select a facilitator from the community. The program adapted literacy course content to issues and economic needs in the community. Program participants have expressed an increased sense of power; mobilized for community development activities; decreased smoking; and begun sending more of their young children, including girls, to school. The program has been effective in assisting women in particular, and the literacy rate for the program area has risen from 42% in 1989 to 54% in 1992. The initial literacy programs have given rise to other initiatives, including the organization of women's groups and income-generating collectives, the transformation of women's social roles, and the development of a home-based, rotating child care system. (AC)

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SAVE THE CHILDREN

NONFORMAL EDUCATION

AND

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

ACTIVITIES

IN RURAL NEPAL

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ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

Save the Children (SC) is a non-profit, non-political, non-religious voluntary organization which has worked in community development in 50 countries around the world for 62 years. SC opened its office in Nepal in 1981 and began working in rural villages of Gorkha District by supporting projects in health, education, income generation, and sustainable agriculture and natural resource management.

THE PROGRAM CONTEXT

Nepal lies at the heart of Asia, landlocked between India and China. Featuring some of the world's highest and most majestic peaks, its northern Himalayan regions give way to the centrally located Middle Hills and finally to the lower plains of the tarai to the south. In comparative terms, Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 115 out of 120 in the *1989 World Development Report*. A conservative estimate by the World Bank in 1991 put between 7 and 8 million of Nepal's 19 million people below the poverty line, the level required to support a minimum daily calorie intake (about US$100 per capita). They are living in "absolute poverty."

Average income is approximated as 3,340 Nepalese Rupees per capita, or about US$130 annually, with income distribution relatively even in the predominantly rural economy. The great majority of Nepalese are engaged in agriculture on their own or rented land and the family farm produces 80% of average household income (Seeds, 1991).

Save the Children works in Gorkha District, a largely isolated rural area situated in the Middle Hills west of Kathmandu. Here, as in much of the country, Nepalese life consists of hard, unrelenting work. The average number of hours that Nepalese of all age groups spend working per day is as follows:

Hours Work Per Day in the Rural Nepal Hills

Adults	
Male	7.9
Female	10.5
Children 10-14	
Male	3.8
Female	6.8
Children 6-9	
Male	1.9
Female	3.7

Source: Nepal: A World Bank Country Study, World Bank, 1991

The *work* defined above includes both conventional and subsistence economic activities as well as domestic work. Women spend much more time than men on subsistence activities and domestic work and as a consequence, their work burden exceeds that of adult men by about 25%.

This gender pattern is established early in life. Girls from the early years have a work burden about double that of boys in the same age groups. Girls work more than boys in all age groups and their work burden increases with age. Not surprisingly then, girls have conflicting priorities which result in fewer opportunities to attend school than their male counterparts, and higher drop out rates when they do.

THE EDUCATIONAL SITUATION

Standards and Statistics

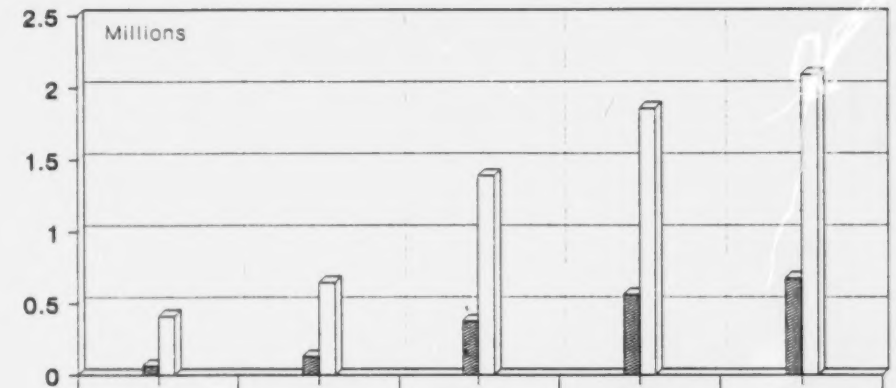
The last four decades has seen rapid growth in Nepal's education sector with the number of primary schools increasing from 321 in 1951, to 15,834 in 1990 and the number of students increased from 8,590 to 2.5 million. The present system requires between 9 and 12 years for completion of primary education, a time span during which, unfortunately, many families cannot do without the efforts of their children, especially girls, in making domestic and economic ends meet. As a consequence of their early and enduring workload, girls spend less than 60% of the time that boys spend in education and reading (World Bank, 1991). Thus, while there have been extraordinary gains and growth in the education system, its strength and expanse in recent years, a great gender discrepancy persists as illustrated below.

Inhibitions to Women's Advancement

There are several principal reasons for young girls' attendance or absence from school. First, traditional views hold that girls' education is not necessary and not a rewarding "investment" for the family. A girl, once married, will live with and work to the benefit of her husband's family. Thus, many families simply opt not to send their girls to school.

If there are younger siblings in the family, the older girls often assume child care responsibilities from an early age. This leads to irregular attendance and often dropping out of school altogether. Many young girls who participate in income-earning activities are also thus limited by time constraints and investment priorities, as it becomes more important for them to earn than to learn.

NUMBER OF GIRLS AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL, 1971 - 1988



	1971	1976	1981	1986	1988
Girls	0.064	0.129	0.374	0.559	0.674
Total	0.411	0.644	1.388	1.858	2.092

Girls Total

Source: Meeting Basic Educational Needs in Nepal, MOEC, 1990

Finally, segregation from men as well as early marriage which is common to several Nepalese districts also act to restrict the woman's chances of attending and/or completing school. All of these factors then reinforce the perceived "uselessness" of girls' education as an investment.

A women's group involved in Save the Children's literacy classes in Bichueri affirms that work constrained their opportunities to study at an early age. They explain that while they "knew the need to study, daily work took up all their time." They had to take care of smaller brothers and sisters while their mothers and fathers were in the field. They wanted to go to school, but couldn't because they "had to look after both buffalos and home."

Girls who are denied schooling are not only deprived of literacy and education, but also of the valuable opportunity of interacting with and learning from peers and cooperating in peer groups. There is now a national policy in place which favors girls' education and provides for special attention to increasing girls' access to school and working around the various obstacles to their advancement cited above.

Literacy
The female literacy rate in Nepal is 18 percent and almost 2 out of every 3 girls do not attend school due to a mix of economic and cultural factors. Further breakdown and elaboration upon the time use figures already presented show the following amount of time that age groups spend in education and reading activities by gender:

Education and Reading Activities in the Rural Nepal Hills **hours per day**	
Adults	
Male	.84
Female	.15
Children 10-14	
Male	3.52
Female	1.44
Children 6-9	
Male	3.22
Female	1.55

Source: Nepal: A World Bank Country Study, World Bank, 1991

Children's and especially girls' absence and irregular attendance in school has been the cause of great concern in Nepal and has ignited a national campaign to impact the obstacles to greater participation and provide opportunities for adult learning.

The National Literacy Campaign
In 1984, the Ministry of Education and World Education produced *Naya Goreto,* or "New Steps", a set of literacy materials whose content is relevant to the learners' lives and whose approach encourages the use of critical and analytical skills. Adapted from Paulo Freire's approach to literacy methods in Brazil, the combination of relevance and critical discussions has proven both a popular and effective approach to basic literacy.

This national literacy system and approach, however, has various management and monitoring difficulties. Specifically, it has proven unable to reach large segments of the illiterate

adult and particularly female populations of rural and isolated areas.

Its operational objectives are termed largely as target *numbers* of centers, classes, facilitators and students. This leads to a situation in which some classes have 60 participants and others have few who attend, but many who are enrolled. Thus, in general, the program focus does not pay close attention to whether or not the participants are literate "at the end of the day." The quotas may be met, but it can remain unclear that the learners learned.

In general, nonformal education is not a priority for the government as formal education is. There is not enough money for adequate supervision and the government tends to focus upon materials distribution (including books, lighting, lamps, salary and blackboards). A centralized curriculum has been instituted in spite of strong local cultural and language differences that exist in a diverse population of which only 58.4% speak Nepali.

Program responsibility is often given to school headmasters, convenient, but often without supervision for them or for the literacy class facilitators. Thus classes open and close as they please. In addition, the facilitator training is short and occurs on only one occasion previous to class commencement.

In terms of management and planning, the government has limited manpower and yet the number of classes multiplies year to year. This occurs without equally increased attention to supervision, adequate training of facilitators or even materials delivery. The Department of Education gives short notice of the number of classes, making it hard to get facilitators. This then means calling an "emergency meeting of school headmasters" at which each is called upon to offer, "there could be X literacy classes in my area." This opens the system up to political influence, as local politicians will try to maximize the numbers and the positive association with education provision for political gains.

THE YOUNG CHILD AND THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

Family in Nepal

As previously mentioned, the woman belongs to the home of her husband and moves there after marriage. Approximately 60.2% of girls between 15 and 19 years are married and it is estimated that 40% of all women are married before they reach 16 years. 16 is the legal age of marriage in Nepal, and yet almost a quarter of Nepalese districts report a mean marriage age below that figure (UNICEF, 1991).

Over time, these factors have affected SC programming much as they affect the families themselves, as women who participate in community programs before marriage move away from the groups in which they have become active members and agents of change.

The Absent Male

A substantial proportion (30-50%) of males from these hills of Nepal temporarily migrate, to India to work as watchmen, or to the border areas to work in construction, coal depots, and forestry. "Temporary," in that they go for at least six months, and on an average stay for two years. In many of the villages where SC works, the men are enlisted in foreign armies or working in the urban areas.

Role of Girl Children in the Home
According to a recent UNICEF survey, by the time girls are 5 or 6 years old, they begin to participate in domestic work. They cook, clean, fetch water, fuel and fodder, tend animals, wash clothes, and manage and care for their younger siblings.

In terms of child care, a case study conducted in 1991 shows that while newborn infants receive a good deal of attention, once a child learns how to crawl, he/she is left to explore a very unhealthy environment (Seeds, 1991). Once the child can walk, he/she is often left with an older sibling, usually a girl of 5 or older. Beyond a lack of parental attention and sanitation, this "system" sets up a learning situation in which a child's major source of information is another child.

Generational Roles in Socialization and Cultural Transmission
The women involved in SC's production groups in Bichueri tell that while they are at work in the fields, they leave food for the children in case they get hungry and the grandparents and older children take care of the youngest children. When the older children are in school, they say, the grandparents are in charge. If there aren't any grandparents, then the older children won't go to school, or else the husband or wife must stay home.

The women think that missing school is a problem and say that "they don't want to make darkness for their children," so they should go to school and be responsible for child care only when they're off on Saturday. Unfortunately, this is not a common opinion or one that is always easy to act upon in the context of isolation and extreme poverty. As seen in the figures quoted above, young girls spend much time in domestic work, which includes child care.

ECD Support Systems in Nepal
Preschool education is limited to the children of the urban elite. UNICEF has recommended that a system of preschool education centers (with age appropriate curricula) be attached to all primary schools. This would both achieve psycho-social benefits for the young girls and boys, and liberate older sisters from child care responsibilities and allow them to attend school. These recommendations have not been put into practice on a national scale.

Save the Children's approach to early childhood in this context of economic need has been built not upon the existing national bureaucratic structure, but upon community organization around education and production activities. In the long term, this attention to local resources and capacities enhances the likelihood of sustainable positive changes in the community. Above all, the cost of the approach being developed is within the communities' ability to maintain.

SAVE THE CHILDREN'S NONFORMAL EDUCATION (NFE) PROGRAM
Save the Children's work in nonformal education has been centered in Gorkha District which is located in the Middle Hills of Nepal northwest of Kathmandu and with elevations between 2,000 and 8,000 feet. It is populated by several castes: the dominant and better educated Brahmin/ Chhetri Hindu castes, the Newars who migrated from the Kathmandu valley, various lower status occupational castes, and mixed tribal

communities of Gurung, Magar and Baramu residing mostly on the northern ranges of the district.

Before SC began its literacy program in 1981, its support to education was traditional, consisting of school construction and materials supply. The extent of SC's early NFE activities was to organize one or two classes while continuing to focus upon addressing other community-defined development priorities. The Nepalese Ministry of Education was the primary implementor of the national literacy program.

Substantial community interest begat community organization, however, and these "pilots," revealed literacy as an effective means of community mobilization. In its literacy approach, SC enlists community participation and organization by insisting that each group interested in forming a class pay for books, registration and tuition (although subsidized by SC), construct a shelter or school and select a facilitator from within the community. Meeting these criteria creates participant ownership of the program and is essential to its success. In contrast, the national program is "provided" and free and has experienced low community and facilitator commitment.

SC's program also features regular supervision, regular meetings and training for community-chosen literacy facilitators in three phases during six months. Local offices make supervision much easier than central management from Kathmandu and sectorial staff placed in each *ilaka*. An *ilaka* is an area of land; seven to eleven *ilakas* form each district in Nepal. This placement of staff and support locally also makes effective and ongoing needs assessment possible.

SC found that an additional benefit to approaching community development via literacy was that the large majority of participants were women. Thus, SC identified this as an effective path for assisting women in particular. SC made the program more relevant to the daily lives of the women by adapting the literacy course content to address key issues and especially economic needs in their lives and expanding it into a second year.

photo: Amy Jo Reinhold

The "literacy" course covers peanut and goat farming, smokeless stove construction and forest conservation and other key practical subjects via the texts and class discussions. SC found motivation high among the women for

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this simultaneous approach to learning reading and group organization for production. The literacy skills are interwoven with the women's and communities' attention to, and attention span for, improving various aspects of their daily lives.

SC Literacy Class

On an August night at 9 pm, more than twenty women of Bhusal Guan village sat under a pointed rectangular roof propped up on bamboo stalks. Together they read and repeated the words in their primers, one woman leading and the others following along with both their voices and their fingers. For six months of two consecutive years, they meet six days a week under the direction of their facilitator, a youngish woman who has completed the 9th grade.

The age range among them is great. There are young girls and grandmothers, but the majority are young women and several have their young children with them. The facilitator goes first as the reader and then calls upon others. The excitement of learning is in their expressions.

They pursue the national literacy curriculum with some key additions by SC during the first session of six months and then follow SC's advanced literacy curriculum during the second session. These sessions are held during the agricultural off-season in two successive years. This particular group is an untouchable caste that began late in the past off-season and thus they are still meeting in August, even though it is among the busiest times of the planting season. Their presence broadcasts their dedication and pride.

In the villages of Deurali in the Gorkha District, as in Bhusal Guan, the community heard of the literacy classes and those members interested joined to discuss the idea. "Hoping to learn many things," they applied for the class. They "hoped to be able to make a brighter future and to be able to send letters" and were very happy when SC confirmed the start of classes.

They chose a facilitator from among those qualified in their community to whom SC provided ongoing training. They were "very happy to study" and 20 community members started in that first ward. They explain now, that SC "gave them their first opportunity to learn."

The SC NFE program has grown extensively since the first pilot communities in 1981. In 1989, it was expanded to achieve coverage in all four *ilakas* of the Gorkha District in which SC works. This expansion has meant an increase in the number of community members benefiting from 4500 to 110,000.

In addition, SC has initiated literacy activities in *ilaka* 4 and 5 of Siraha District, a district in the tarai, or low lying plains of Nepal, in which SC works. This area has a total beneficiary population of 104,000.

The "beneficiary populations" of Gorkha and Siraha noted here are calculated including community members benefitting both directly and indirectly from this SC program. The numbers among the total SC beneficiary populations that are or have been directly involved in the NFE program over the past decade are seen in the following tables:

SC NFE Program Participation

YEAR	CLASS	PARTICIPANTS
83-84	26	702
84-85	38	784
85-86	45	905
86-87	47	982
87-88	39	776
88-89	30	518
89-90	106	1,988
90-91	229	5,337
91-92	358	9,067
TOTAL	918	21,059

The large majority of adult NFE participants are women. In addition to the basic and advanced classes for adults, SC has supported a class for out of school children aimed at enabling children who have dropped out of the formal schooling system or have had limited access to such schooling for various reasons to (re)enter once basic skills have been mastered.

OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN

This story was told by the older members of the group in Bichueri. The young girl smiled shyly with pride, looking down at her dress while the group members explained her successes. The atmosphere the women created as they spoke of her was proud and fulfilled: they radiated a sense of accomplishment and hope.

Purna Nepali is a young girl who started primary school and attended through class three. At that point, however, she was out of school so much taking care of her younger brothers and sisters and doing work in the home that she failed the exam to complete the third grade. She joined SC's literacy course, studying at night with a group of community women and other children who, like her, were unable to attend school.

After she finished the two years' classes, she rejoined the school at class three. Her brothers and sisters are no longer small babies and she is freer. She finished class three last spring and was first in her class.

Left: Women from the village of Bhusal Guan in Gorkha District meet after a full day in the fields to study together. Some e are of school age, but their work keeps them from attending formal schools during the day. The literacy classes that meet at might allow them to both study and fulfill their responsibilities at home.
photo: Amy Jo Reinhold

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The following figures are SC's NFE program enrollment rates in 1991-1992 and a breakdown of these participants by sex.

1991-1992 NFE ENROLLMENT		
AREA	**CLASS**	**PARTICIPANTS**
Gorkha 1	39	1144
Gorkha 4	66	1747
Gorkha 6	34	985
Gorkha 7	100	2444
Siraha	119	2747
TOTAL	358	9067

1991-1992 NFE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION	
AREA	**% FEMALE**
Gorkha, *Ilaka* 1	89.4%
Gorkha, *Ilaka* 4	91.4%
Gorkha, *Ilaka* 6	65.1%
Gorkha, *Ilaka* 7	90.4%
Siraha, *Ilaka* 4,5	96.0%

The discrepancy seen in *Ilaka 6*, where the percentage of women participants dips noticeably to 65.1%, is due to the utter isolation of the area which makes illiteracy rates and the demand for nonformal education opportunities high among men as well.

Materials and Future NFE Directions
SC has developed a close working relationship with partners in literacy in Nepal. The literacy materials produced by SC (second year primers and a post-literacy journal) are used by 12 or 13 other organizations, mostly NGOs, that are implementing literacy programs in Nepal. SC has also begun training trainers from BASE (Bold Action for Social Education) a local NGO in Dang, a district to the southwest of Gorkha. This group is expected to support approximately 500 classes in 1993.

SC supports the use of literacy beyond the advanced year by publishing a journal for "neoliterates" of all NGO literacy projects. This journal encourages neoliterates to submit articles for each issue and includes a pen pal section which invites participants to send their pictures and addresses and begin writing to each other. Future support to post-literacy activities may also include the establishment of a network of village reading centers in which each village would invest in various books and reading materials.

Another project intended to strengthen the NFE program and increase support to the formal education system will encourage literacy use while building up the link between parent and school. This is envisioned as using materials that will encourage parent-teacher communication, such as a notebook in which the teacher writes about the students and the parents respond therein. A similar approach to enhancing parent-child interaction will also be approached through post-literacy materials.

The impact of regional differences in language and culture on literacy programming has been of great debate in many countries and locations. This is especially true in Nepal as only 58.4% of the population speak Nepali. For SC, this issue is most pointed in the tarai region of Siraha and in the isolated *Ilaka* 6 on the northernmost corner of Gorkha District.

SC and other NGOs working in literacy have pursued this issue in various discussions and have supported its close study in three parts of the country. For its part, SC has taken action in supporting post-literacy materials development in local languages where the communities are primary users of another dialect. In addition, the trainings being conducted by SC in Dang focus upon the development of local language materials for neoliterates.

SC has established itself as a forerunner in the design and implementation of literacy and integrated nonformal education programs in Nepal. Developing, publishing and disseminating materials relevant to the adults' daily lives, SC impacts learning and community development in the districts in which it works directly, in the areas in which other NGOs work and at the national level.

Impact of NFE on Women's lives

Speaking with various groups of women who are or have been involved in SC's programs reveals the extent to which their opportunities have been expanded by meeting in groups to read, write, interact and organize. Ram Maya Ale of Bichueri tells:

> Before study, we couldn't read or write and we had to spend all our time in daily work and home work. We used to be shy to speak with people, now we can speak freely. We didn't know anything about outside the village. Visiting another village was confusing - which bus, when it would arrive at the destination - now we can read which bus goes where and can read the sign 'Kathmandu'. This is a good opportunity.

Her fellow group members and women from other areas agree and expand upon her statement explaining how the group learning has affected their lives. They can read and write letters to and from their husbands. They have learned to sign their names and thus don't face the embarrassment of using a thumbprint.

They read newspapers and learn about the outside world and proudly share the information with their illiterate parents. Now they know symptoms and treatment of fever and diarrhea, preparation of ORS and they know that they should send their children to school.

Above: Women involved in SC's literacy classes meet at the home of their group leader Sita Maya Ale and discuss their progress and experience as well as their future educational needs.
photo: Amy Jo Reinhold

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Those living close to a rubber factory in the district can now fill out applications for jobs previously inaccessible to them. A young group leader named Sita Maya Ale tells:

> I feel a vast change in myself. I used to spend all of my time with brothers and sisters in daily work and at home. Now, after I've completed the literacy classes, I can learn much more. Before, I had to ask another person to write a letter to my brother and parents. Now, I can do it myself. I can do group work and I write official letters for this work. I can read official letters that come too. When SC sends letters to call us, I can read it and talk and speak. I can attend meetings and be an active member of the community.

Likewise, the group leader in the village of Garadani expresses the difficulty of surmising the many benefits and changes that she and her group have experienced via the literacy and related group activities.

> We learned <u>everything</u>. It's so much that it's hard to explain. Before we were in darkness and didn't know good from bad, we didn't know the important things we know now. Now we realize what we need to do for ourselves and why: as with the community plantation and the conservation of this system as a water source for our children's future and how that is affected by sanitation.

By reading the lessons and discussing and applying the ideas, they have made improvements in their daily lives that make sense to them and they are eager to explain this to others.

Indeed, the content of the courses as well as the achievement of literacy has a significant impact on the adult learners, their families and community. The illustrations above show the qualitative and personal side of program impact. A study of the impact of these program pilots carried out in 1989 for USAID found that women participating in the literacy classes knew the causes of and preventative measures for diarrhea, preparation and correct use of oral rehydration therapy, and more about family planning and birth spacing than non-participating women. In addition, they fully immunized their children more frequently. Beyond these changes in health behaviors directly related to curriculum content, the following positive behavior changes were noted among literacy class participants:

- Expressions of power are much increased; villagers who attend the classes are more frank, do not feel so shy in communicating with strangers and outsiders and are also more polite than the other villagers;

- Class participants are easier to motivate for various community development activities, such as family planning, kitchen garden improvement, pit latrine, building, etc.;

- Cooperation among villagers for community development activities is increasing in the areas where adult literacy centers were opened;

- The number of participants who smoke has decreased;

- Parents who participate are sending more of their school-aged children to schools;

- The number of girls attending school is increasing in the villages where there are adult literacy centers.

In terms of impact upon illiteracy itself, the baseline percentage of literate population in Gorkha's *Ilaka* 1 at the time of expansion in 1989 was: 41.87% and by 1992 it was 54.32%. While the causal relationship between this increase and SC's programs must be established through further study, the ancillary effects of the program content mentioned above are clear indicators that the integrated approach to literacy used in this district is a strong model for successful program implementation both on a national and an international scale.

Obstacles to Participation

The women in Bichueri are at different stages of literacy participation. Their leader, a single woman, has completed the SC course. Some attended classes for 3 or 4 months, but didn't finish. Bishnu Maya was in this situation and did not complete the literacy classes because her child was small and sick. Now she would like to have the chance to learn to read again. Many who had young children at the time the literacy class was started now have them in school and are free to study.

One woman in Garadani told the following:

> When the women in the community called her to come she said, "I have lots of work and study isn't useful for us." Now I realize that the literacy classes are very important. The participants can read and write and I have become jealous. If I have the time, I can be ready to participate and read. I realize I missed a big opportunity. In several cases, the women participated for a period of time and did learn the importance of group work in the classes, becoming members of a production and savings group.

Married women participants tell that they've experienced problems in attending classes because their in-laws are illiterate. In such a case, the in-laws don't want her to study because they think she'll learn many things and begin to lead the family. They feel threatened and think they must stop her from going to study.

One woman started going to literacy classes and her in-laws and their son too asked who would do the housework? If it wasn't done, she couldn't go. She would leave the small children at home, but the husband said to take them with her. Her father and mother-in-law said this too. So she had to take them with her. It was too difficult and she couldn't complete the classes. Even husbands who are supportive want to sleep freely after a day's work and the children cry. When the small kids disturb them they become angry and demand that the women take them to the classes.

Other daughters-in-law also expressed that their low status within the family meant a larger relative work load in the household and left them less time for learning, especially formal schooling, as they are too busy. "It's better at night for just two hours. Then we can learn as much as we hope. School takes all day and doesn't allow for daily work." SC's night classes meet their educational needs while allowing them to meet their other commitments.

Many women who have finished the SC course express interest in studying again. As for those who haven't completed the course, they must organize a class that meets the criteria: a minimum of 20 students, a facilitator, a "shelter" and fees for books. The only exception to these requirements are in the poorest of poor communities where smaller groups and terms more appropriate to their means may be possible.

Organizing Women

SC literacy classes serve as a strong motivator to women's organization, an element further strengthened by the curriculum. The organization of women's groups around various production activities in SC's programs happened primarily via the NFE program and its expanded curricula. In this sense, program impact has been substantial as over 100 active women's production groups have emerged in Gorkha alone.

The women's groups are formed from literacy classes. The curriculum discusses what they can do to address their needs. Thus, as they learn to read, they gain useful practical knowledge of pig raising and kitchen gardening, banana, fish, potato, and ginger farming and establishing community plantations. As with a lesson on an improved smokeless cooking stove, the information includes what it is, its advantages, and how to make it, use it and clean it.

Beyond the practical, contextually relevant information, the literacy training for groups includes information on and discussion around the benefits of group work in the community, as well as issues of working with government and NGO support, etc. All community training also includes the explicit discussion of SC activities as ultimately benefitting the child and this is very motivating in the training.

Throughout this learning, the women contribute their tuition fees to establish a group savings fund. To be "recognized", groups must have 10 to 20 women members and display fundraising and management capability by raising 1000 NEPALESE RUPEES. In addition, they should be in close proximity for easy group communication and must have carried out activities included in the literacy content on their own. Such activity criteria or prerequisites for group members include knowledge of ORS and family planning, smokeless stoves and latrines. Action upon these and other relevant practical information included in the curriculum content of the literacy courses shows both mobilization and commitment on the part of the women.

The formation and recognition of many women's groups achieved through the curriculum content altered SC's overall program goal as well as its scope. What began as a pilot project in literacy has become an integrated women's development project including aspects of health, education, economic development and agriculture and natural resource management. Now the classes are seen as stepping stones to more all-encompassing objectives of social and personal transformation.

From the start, the women learn about the associated the activities and support available to them from contact with neighboring villages and relatives. From the first organizing discussions, they know that participation and group

work doesn't have to end as a literacy-numeracy class. The women go on field trips during the class to see other classes' projects and activities and are already quite motivated as they are more responsible for meeting family needs.

As the women of Bichueri tell it, "before we started we were in a dark place and didn't know anything about group importance." They joined the literacy class and they discovered the importance of group work and what is necessary to work together. This integration of approaches and goals serves to further reinforce the impact of SC's program.

Group Work

Once formed, the women's groups undertake expansion upon the activities about which they have begun learning during the literacy courses, as well as other fund raising and income-generating activities. They establish a group savings scheme and an emergency fund to allow group members to afford treatment in the case of sickness. At a monthly meeting for group decision making on money and management problems the groups consider opportunities for both group and individual loans to be made from their fund.

According to SC's NFE staff in Nepal, "what came out of the literacy system were scores of women's groups that needed support." Why? Those women completing the advanced literacy course are functional in terms of literacy and the content they learn encourages them to put these new ideas into practice. Through the group fund, over two years the understanding between the members grows. What they learn motivates them to be in a group.

In addition, there is extreme importance in the companionship and camaraderie the women find through these groups and activities. The daily routine before the women of Bichueri formed a group together entailed: early food preparation for the husband and children, working in the field and gathering grass for the animals and for fuel, returning to cook lunch. Then, back to the field for plantation work and finally, cooking and feeding the family once again in the evening, doing more of the household chores before retiring to begin the whole cycle again. The women did all of this alone and fairly isolated from others in the community. Now that they're in a group, they don't feel alone and support each other. They also share their group work and it takes less time.

Above: The women of Garadani gather for a meeting, speaking of recent village events and sharing their problems. The camaraderie in the group is evident, if not only by the amount of laughter punctuating the conversation. They have a comfort and ease with each other and the younger members in the group smile in the protective advice and doting of the older women. The atmosphere and their incessant chatter have a "we'll get through this together" feel to it.
photo: Amy Jo Reinhold

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Almost invariably the women in each literacy class urge SC to recognize them as a group and once formed they require follow-up, technical assistance, training and other support. These support responsibilities are those of the SC Women's Development (WD) staff. The numbers of groups are increasing rapidly: from 85 in March 1992 to 101 by August of the same year.

Impact of Collective Work

In *Ilaka* 1, one of the four areas of Gorkha district where SC works, 48 women's groups have been formed through the NFE program. Among these are the women of Bichueri whose first activity was forest conservation and plantation. Then they began individual vegetable gardens, followed by goat farming in a group and most recently chicken farming. With each advance, they have increased food available and income, if they sell their products. This past season, each of the women earned 80 Nepalese Rupees profit.

Here, the group's fund is increasing as they diversify their activities. However, the women have not yet chosen to take out individual loans from this fund. Thus, while the capital and capacity are present, the motivation and willingness to take the risk is not yet developed. There is a security benefit from the existence of the fund and the women seem satisfied with it for the moment.

A women's group in Garadani that finished literacy classes over a year ago explains that before taking SC's course,

> They worked in the field, cooked and fed their children and did the daily work of the house. They didn't know the importance of education and sending the children to school. They didn't know they could go to the bazaar for marketing and they spent the whole day in the field.
>
> They didn't know love and how to care for their children. They were in the field early and didn't see their children. They came back late at might and didn't see them in the evening either. They only thought about how to get enough food. They didn't know anything about outside their village.

The women's increased abilities and activities, has a broader effect upon the community in that there is a changing perception of women's roles as they increasingly manage stores, plant trees, earn income, build home-improving structures, actively partake in community politics, and become the source of important health knowledge.

Altered Social Roles and Community Reaction

In various villages, women participants are experiencing a change in the social roles and capacities as a result of group education and action. In some locales, community members agree with the women and the work they are doing, and feel the work is good for the future. In Phinam village, the women solicit the support and participation of the community in their various projects. As the community participates in the women's group efforts, the women in turn help in other community projects.

"Without the community," they explain, "we couldn't do anything!" As with vegetable planting, the community saw that it was good for their earnings and status and gave more and more suggestions and offered support and

help. There are "too many problems for the women to do everything themselves."

As with building a house, they need holes for the pillars, roofs and wood and they can't do such work without the community people, and in this example without the men. "They help us and we help them in return." In this tight and cooperative group, they explain that when the community comes to mobilize them, they'll find a replacement to help out if they don't have time. One woman tells that she was replaced by her mother-in-law, another by her brother-in-law; a third sent her father-in-law.

In the low caste community of Raniswara, the women proudly tell that "they lead the community." It is a new position and situation for them, uncommon in their community, but they like it. Their husbands approve and help them with the new work. They support their projects and say, "You are ahead of us, we walk behind."

In other areas, however, support is "in words only," or husbands and families "don't see the importance of their participation and need convincing". In Bichueri, increased women's participation in the community and its affairs and development has created a management problem with the forest conservation project. As SC decreases its role in the project, community responsibility increases and the whole community is currently participating under the jurisdiction of the women's group.

The men do not like this and their attitude and actions are the source of management difficulties as they resist further participation. Thus, the community is discussing the need to "punish" them in some way in order to convince them to participate as others do.

Other effects of participation and new-found abilities have been a source of change, bringing some tension into various community and family relationships. There are reports of women organizing in numbers much greater than those found in a single group to demand more education and further education about their rights and the rights of their children. Some groups have even demonstrated against the men for drinking, gambling and "wasting time".

On The International Day of the Woman in 1992, there was a rally in *Ilaka* 4 of Gorkha District in which three or four groups converged upon a local liquor store. And in Siraha, other groups held a rally supporting increased education for girls. Some of the groups, it is said, even enforce a 5 Rupee fine upon their husbands each time they come home drunk after 6 pm.

The social and family roles of these women in rural Nepal have been altered as they have gained literacy skills, created systems of group support for production and changed and enhanced their capacity in problem solving and organization for improvement in their individual and community environments.

Literacy and Group Work: Continued Collective Action

Many women who have finished the SC course express interest in studying again. They'd like to learn more about productive activities like the ones they've already learned. making

material out of cotton and knitting are of particular interest. They are ready to do more activities, and want to improve their economic status through understanding the detail of the subject.

For example, they'd like to learn about how cloth is made and from what etc., just as they learned about the nursery and plantation. Also, they say they want to learn "more about increasing income itself, not just about various activities" that achieve that effect. One group is also interested in organizing the community for a village rice mill project if possible, as they cannot do this on their own. For this, the community people must agree to help. They must solve this problem together.

And in Bichueri, a group wants to study accounts keeping and budgeting to better manage the (group) budget, as well as health advice and healthy eating habits for them and their families, and information on jobs - qualifications for specific positions and how to apply.

Program Expansion and Child Care

Along with these production-oriented priorities, several of the women's groups have noted and discussed how their child care responsibilities limit the extent to which they can capitalize upon their gains and further enhance their progress. In Takukot, an isolated area of Gorkha, the women's participation in NFE brought the issue to light as the children would sit in the corners of literacy classes and group meetings.

SC staff saw this happening and explained the idea of home-based rotating day care: a group of mothers, in this case seven mothers get together to form a system of child care in which one day per week each stays in from the fields and takes care of the seven children. SC staff used the established program of home-based child care supported by Redd Barna in a neighboring district as an illustration. The women in Takukot talked about it and were interested. They visited the Redd Barna sites and started the activities themselves.

Left: As in many of SC's program impact areas, the women of Bhusal Guan pictured here often bring their children with them to literacy class. This situation and other expressions of the constraints and difficulties of their child care responsibilities has led SC and the women's groups to discussions on child care programming possibilities.

photo: Amy Jo Reinhold

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As of August 1992, two women's groups had begun to address their need for child care by organizing among themselves, taking turns caring for the children each day, rotating through the week. This occurs either in the women's homes or in a makeshift center and is supported by ongoing trainings for the mothers. These cover child development issues such as learning through play, the development of simple, cheap and available educational materials and improvements to the physical environment and diet for better child health, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation.

Likewise in Chhap Guan, the women came to the NFE class with their children who slept or played together in the corner. Sometimes they disturbed the study. Through very informal talk, the group expressed to the SC staff that there was no other solution that they saw, "we must bring them".

SC staff and many of the women's groups are pursuing discussion of the idea. In one area, it arose in a discussion of one of the literacy lessons. One primer lesson suggested that the women could save making a separate trip out of the home to gather wood or other materials they needed if they gathered it on their way home from working in the field. The women revealed that this was impossible because they had to carry the children. They might do this only if they had an opportunity to leave the children at home.

Their child care needs take further advantage of SC programs and limited personal development. Among other things, child care would give both increasing freedom to come to classes and increasing opportunity to carry things home from the field. Many other SC women's groups are considering the idea and options and its adaptation appropriate to their own situations.

ECD Programs in Nepal

A recent UNICEF report observes that young children may attend school with their older siblings and while they are seated in a separate "infant class," they are taught the Grade 1 curriculum. The large number of these children (5% of total enrollment in 1988) reflects the need for a child care system in Nepalese communities.

There *is* a system of day care centers supported by the government wherein food is free, parents drop their children off and pay nothing. This system supports parents' expectation of day care centers as a service provided to them. For their children to attend school, the parents must purchase books and pay for the food children need during the day. Therefore, of the two services, they prefer the day care centers.

This government project is carried out by the Women's Development Department in conjunction with UNICEF and includes the provision of kits and play materials. There are two such centers *Ilaka* 1 of Gorkha and the government has promised a third center. While this project and its centers are spread throughout the country, in a few sites per district, it is recognized as being neither sustainable nor community owned.

SC has had previous experience in child care programming in Nepal in this "provision-centered" vein. In Deurali during the early eighties, SC supported a child care program which consisted of

six centers. SC constructed the buildings, hired teachers and paid their salaries, and distributed milk and play materials.

In terms of sustainability and replication, The program was unsuccessful. The villagers' expectations were too high and they expected continuation of "give aways." They couldn't be motivated to bring rice or other inputs, and thus the program did not establish community program ownership or responsibility.

This time around, SC is building upon the needs that the women have recognized themselves. Together, SC and the women's groups will establish community-owned systems for child care provision while enhancing their own and community awareness about child development and meeting children's needs with limited resources.

SC and Home-based Rotating Child Care in Chhap Guan

In Chhap Guan, a group of six women (1 grandmother and 5 mothers) who completed the literacy course have set up a system of rotating child care based on this model. They started in March 1992 and in May they requested SC support.

Seto Gurans, a Nepalese NGO concerned with ECD, was hired by SC to do a training workshop with the women which was held on 17-22 May. It covered the production of toys for the children from locally available materials as well as their use in the child care program. This included discussion and training on the cognitive, physical, social, emotional and language development of children under five.

Above: The grandmother in the women's group in Chhap Guan that has organized a rotating ECD program, sits to play with an infant and the bean bag she holds while two older boys look on. photo: Amy Jo Reinhold

The materials in Chhap Guan's makeshift child care center are simple and fun. Bamboo stacks, smaller bamboo pieces painted and stacked on sticks together by color, dolls, cushions and bean bags in various shapes, sizes and colors for throwing. The "center" itself is one third stone wall, one third leaves woven between bamboo shoots and one third open.

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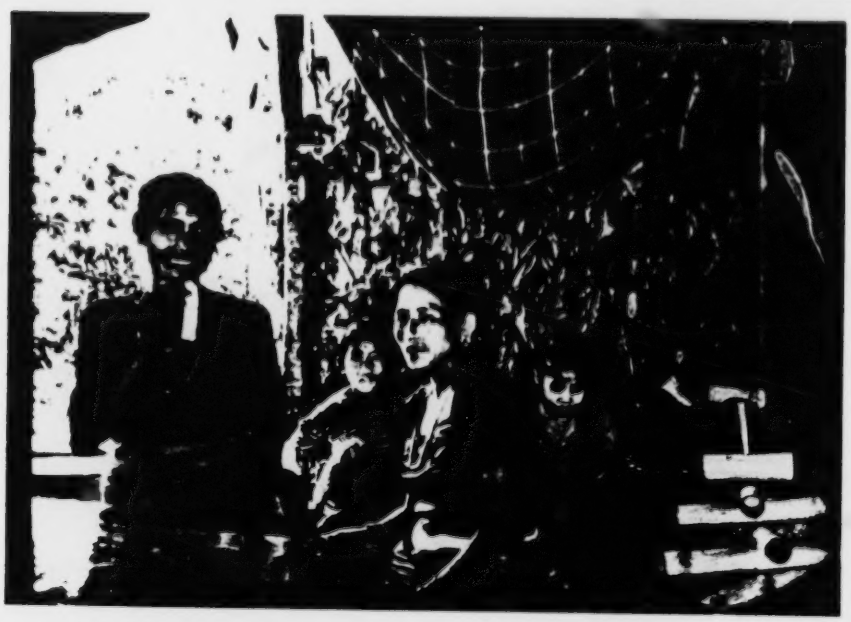
Right: One of SC's Women Development Field Coordinators speaks with the women of Chhap Guan about the educational toys and materials they have developed from locally available resources.

Two hammocks hang from the center ceiling. One woman used a stick to prop one hammock open, while the other remained tightly shut. The women swing the children in these hammocks to rock them to sleep or put the babies there after they have fallen asleep.

The children, who range in age from 0 to 2, are familiar with the toys and play catch and explore things freely. The women tell that dolls are the most popular materials with the children and they as caregivers preferred the dolls as well because the children would often entertain and play amongst themselves and were easier to handle.



Left: Two mothers of Chhap Guan village meet midday and discuss the ECD program, its recent progress and key training needs for improving the activities in the coming months.

photos:
Amy Jo Reinhold

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The fathers of these children are absent or almost always occupied. When they have free time, they come around, but in this village, many of them are in India working. The grandparents are often around, but teenagers never. The younger sons and daughters of the six mothers in this group hang around the center and help when they don't have school and it's their mother's turn to watch the children.

The women meet regularly to let the other mothers know what their child is and is not eating and to suggest other foods to try. They also tell them if the child is sick and suggest they stay home to keep a close watch and not bring them to the center. The project is still "very experimental", they explain, and they don't know what works best yet.

Currently, the women feel a need to improve the care with some health training, including nutrition and how to better care for the child - its needs and how to meet them. They haven't yet tried all that they learned in the above-mentioned training in May 1992.

Since August, this group of women has requested and received SC support for a nutrition training and a health and sanitation training to enhance the quality of their ECD activities. The women note that the literacy content is very practical in presentation and want such classes to continue with content more focussed upon child development issues as they believe that type of idea and presentation and discussion can help their project.

Benefits to the Women

The biggest benefit these women have experienced from establishing this system is that they are free from worry about their child at home. They don't need to think constantly about when they need to return home from the field to tend to their children's needs and to feed them.

They used to leave in the morning and come back after a few hours and then return to the field. They'd leave the children in hanging hammocks and guess from afar when they'd be awake and hungry and need their mother's attention. Now they can go further and stay the whole day and be assured that someone is taking care of their child.

In addition, they don't have to pay someone else to work in their field during the time they must be away and so needn't exchange money for labor at all any more. They can work full time six days a week and can go further away to work in the fields, increasing their options and income generating opportunity.

Program Expansion

The neighboring villages are taking note, talking about the emerging child care solution these women are working with and are asking for all kinds of information on who supports it, how and to what extent. In Garadani, mothers in the group with young children are thinking of home-based system and want to know what SC can provide. Observers from Bhusal Guan attended the May training in Chhap Guan and are interested in starting up a similar program.

In Bichueri, the women think the home-based rotating system is a good idea, but want to think about building a center and hiring a teacher instead. As this is the area in which SC tried and failed in its first child care attempt, the field coordinators are hesitant to raise any community expectations in terms of SC support for a model liable to have high recurrent costs. These and other groups are proceeding slowly in their discussions of ECD activities and options. SC doesn't want to raise expectations of service delivery. The communities must realize their own needs and meet them.

Further Program Directions

The SC staff are currently working on strengthening several aspects of the NFE program and are building upon its strong base to meet community priorities in education and children's needs. A project being carried out by SC in concert with UNESCO will produce a baby book that combines to meet both post-literacy and early childhood development information needs. It will also create a record of the child's health and development and raise parental awareness about children's healthy development.

In the spring of 1993, a Nepalese graduate student will undertake an ethnographic study to inform programmatic options on childrearing practices and parent-child interaction. This will be used primarily in development of the baby book and associated lessons on child development, but will also provide a valuable description of parent practices for future evaluation and comparison.

The SC Women's Development Officer points out this approach may also create an overwhelming demand for ECD once such awareness is raised. This will come via ECD literacy content additions to the curriculum, the baby book and a flip chart upon which she is currently working. This is precisely what happened with women's group formation, as dozens of groups formed through the literacy activities, forcing SC to expand its NFE program and hire women's development field staff specifically for work with these many groups. As NFE made people more sensitive to education, especially for girls. This effect could be similar with ECD, as participants will be more sensitive to ECD.

The ECD components of the larger NFE and Women's Development projects are funded now with available grant money or with private contributions to SC, as is possible. The cost of the program thus far has been minimal. The training that was given in Chhap Guan for materials and their use cost $500 and a later, one-day nutrition training was only $25 since SC has trained health staff able to lead such sessions.

A grant for specific support to ECD with some attention to maintaining the strong NFE/WD base, has been submitted to the Danish Government via Red Barnet for consideration. These monies would support further development of ECD program aspects and their expansion into more villages within SC's existing NFE/WD impact areas. As noted above, the extent of community and specifically women's groups' demand for the project could mushroom without a grant and without SC's attention to program expansion, but SC could support it only on a very small scale.

SC's approach to NFE has been to energize the process of becoming literate with useful daily information relevant to the needy communities of Gorkha and Siraha. Its success has been the basis for a network of women's groups which continue production and other activities to the benefit of themselves, their families and their communities. Now the program has spawned a variety of activities focussing more specifically on the needs of children and has formed a vital program within "Strong Beginnings," Save the Children's international early childhood development initiative.

Nationally relevant and prominent in literacy and community development, SC's NFE and Women's Development programs belie valuable lessons for approaches to nonformal education both for Nepal and a larger education and development audience:

* Make curriculum relevant to the lives of the learners, otherwise you will not get their attention and time;

* Require community initiative via participation in management, planning, fees, etc., as appropriate to ensure program ownership and commitment sustainability;

* Locate facility, teaching and supervisory capacity close to the community;

* Integrate the program approach and goals across sectors - health, education, agriculture and natural resource management - to address a community's many needs and interests most cost effectively;

* Be prepared to meet the demand for further support aroused by raising awareness and empowering people to meet their own needs.

* It can be expected that by empowering women, issues of child care responsibilities and supporting healthy child development will be brought to the forefront.

These lessons shape SC's approach to nonformal education and have both produced a sizeable and expanding women's development program and sown the seed for an ECD program. The community interest and needs and demand for ECD programs, forms a new focus for SC's continuing work and the next challenge for its ongoing learning and partnership with communities.

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